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SUBJECT: ROKG ANNOUNCES FLOOD ASSISTANCE TO NORTH KOREA

REF: SEOUL 2684

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) On August 11, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade North American Affairs Division I Director Hahn Choong-hee provided the Embassy with the Ministry of Unification (MOU) press release announcing that the ROKG has decided to provide USD 10 million (10 billion SKW) of matching flood relief to North Korea through NGOs (text in para 3). Next week, Seoul is expected to decide how much assistance it will also provide via Red Cross channels, which will likely be in the form of rice, probably quite large quantities. Separately, Deputy Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se confirmed to A/DCM that Seoul opted for a two-prong approach of (1) matching South Korean NGO relief assistance and (2) sending additional aid through the Red Cross.

12. (C) COMMENT: ROK efforts to paint this support as "emergency aid" indicates that Seoul sees that renewed assistance risks softening the "tough" ROKG response to the DPRK missile launches. By citing ROK aid in 2004 after an explosion at a North Korean train station and DPRK aid in 1984 following floods in the South, the MOU press release underscores the ROKG attempt to stress the humanitarian nature of this decision. END COMMENT.

TEXT OF 8/11 UNIFICATION MINISTRY PRESS RELEASE  
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13. (U) Government Decides to Participate in Emergency Relief for North Korea Flood Damage

Today, the 5th general conference of the "Government-Private Council for North Korean Assistance," which is a consultative body for humanitarian aid groups and the government, was held at the central government complex.

Today's conference was led by Hong Jeong-gil, Chairman of the "Private Council for North Korean Cooperation" from the private sector, and MOU Deputy Minister Shin Un-sang. Officials from relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and representatives from North Korean aid groups also participated.

At today's conference, where emergency relief for North

Korean flood damage was discussed, the Private Council for North Korean Cooperation said that it had made plans to send 9.86 billion won worth of relief goods such as daily necessities and medical goods (with the participation of the National Reconciliation Committee) to the North, and asked for government assistance.

--The Government decided to participate in the emergency relief project for humanitarian purposes, taking into consideration the seriousness of the flood damage, and the calls for assistance by the political circle and all levels of the society.

The assistance volume that the government will contribute to the private groups will be around 10 billion won in matching funds, taking into consideration the assistance made by the private groups.

--Relief items will be daily necessities, medical goods, and basic flood recovery equipment. Detailed items and volume will be decided through private-public working-level meetings.

Since the (South) Korean Red Cross requested government participation by the government, the government will hold discussions with the Korean Red Cross next week, and determine the items, volume, and timing of assistance.

Like the rehabilitation aid for the Ryonchong (train station) disaster, the upcoming assistance will be made purely for humanitarian purposes.

--2004 Ryongchong: 150 deceased, 1,300 injured, 89,100 houses destroyed. Private assistance 28.3 billion won and Korean Red Cross 42.1 billion won: Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund 3.34 billion won, special budget for grain management 7.4 billion won, national donations 17 billion won, aid given by private sector 13.7 billion won. Total 70 billion won.

--2004 Ryongchong aid (cont'd): 5,000 metric tons of rice, 5,000 metric tons of wheat flour, as well as blankets, instant noodles, excavators, and trucks.

--In 1984 following floods in South Korea, North Korea sent 7,300 metric tons of rice, 500,000 square meters of fabric, and 100,000 metric tons of cement. END TEXT.  
VERSHBOW